STAFFING FORMULAE FOR THE AID OFFICE

by Thomas D. Morris

After twenty years of operating financial aid programs, the profession still has not agreed upon several important issues. The problem of certification is not only still alive, but is just as controversial as ever. The aid delivery system has been studied and re-studied; there is little agreement on the propriety of verifying income data; and the problem of providing adequate staff for the financial aid office perhaps depends as much upon the persuasiveness of the Director as it does upon an objective measurement of the workload.

But if many of these issues defy solution, there is one - the staffing problem - that appears to be more susceptible to resolution than the others.

This matter was first addressed by William VanDusen and John O'Hearne, who produced an admirable little pamphlet that stood as the landmark in the field for many years.[1] Unfortunately, rapid changes in the financial aid world quickly made this fine work obsolete, and, to date, nothing has replaced it. As a result, financial aid offices across the country have had to work out their own staffing formulae within the context of institutional philosophy and budgetary limitations.

This procedure may be fully satisfactory to the offices involved, as it does-or should - take into consideration the individual differences found in each aid operation. And differences do exist. One office, for example, may be fully computerized, while others have no computer support at all. NDSL loan collections are handled by some offices, while others do not have that responsibility. Some aid offices manage massive scholarship funds; others may have no such funds at all. Consequently, there is and can be no panacea to cure all staffing ills, but this does not mean that logical staffing formulae cannot be developed and perhaps used by aid offices which find that their legitimate personnel needs are not being met.

There appear to be several criteria which must be considered in the development of such a formula. First and foremost, the formula must identify and include all forces which contribute to the financial aid workload. Second, the formula must provide hard data, information which can be counted, verified and audited, if necessary. Third, the formula must be flexible, not only to allow for differences between offices, but to meet the changing conditions that occur in all offices. Fourth, the data that goes into the formula must be readily available to the institution, so that valuable time will not be spent in accumulating information.

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[1] William Van Dusen and John J. O'Hearne, *A Design for a Model College Financial Aid Office,* College Entrance Examination Board, New York, 1968.

In examining the operation of the aid office, we find that there are three data elements which meet the above criteria: (a) The number of students undertaking at least a half-time load; (b) the number of applications for aid received during a year, including BEOG; and (c) the dollar amount of funds administered. These factors, therefore, may legitimately constitute the base components for the authorization of staff positions to the aid office.

The next, and perhaps most difficult step, is to assign position values to each level of the three components. We start here by saying that each aid office should be authorized a director, regardless of workload. This official, of course, is the institutional representative and functions in a management capacity, interfacing with the administration, students and outside agencies, such as the Office of Education, to provide aid to students. We then proceed to build his/her staff, using the following tables[2]:

Counselor Authorization Charts

(N = A-1 + A-2 + A-3)

Component A-1 Regular student enrollment (1/2 time or more.)

Number of Positions	Number of Students
0.5	0 - 5,999
1.0	6,000 - 12,999
1.5	13,000 - 20,999
2.0	21,000 - 25,999

Component A-2 Dollar Value Administered (all programs.)

Number of Positions	$ Amount
0.5	0 - 999,999
1.0	1,000,000 - 1,599,999
1.5	1,600,000 - 2,299,999
2.0	2,300,000 - 3,099,999
2.5	3,100,000 - 3,999,999
3.0	4,000,000 - 4,999,999
3.5	5,000,000 - 6,099,999
4.0	6,100,000 - 7,499,999

Component A-3 Number of applications received (all programs.)

Number of Positions	Number Received
0.5	0 - 999
1.0	1000 - 1999
1.5	2000 - 2999
2.0	3000 - 4499
2.5	4500 - 5599
3.0	6000 - Over

Hypothetically, therefore, a school with the following characteristics would compute its counseling staff as shown:

A-1	Number of regular students:	7250	= 1 counselor
A-2	Dollar value of money administered:	$2,332,720	= 2 counselors
A-3	Number of applications received:	3650	= 2 counselors
	A-1 + A-2 + A-3		= 5 counselors

[2] These tables were originally developed after a work-load survey conducted by the Chancellor's Office, California State University and Colleges, and are now used by that agency. I have revised some of the items to reflect what I consider more realistic parameters.

A financial aid office, of course, cannot operate without skilled and dedicated clerical support, so a formula must also be devised to authorize this category of employee. The same three components are used.

Clerical Authorization Chart

(N = B-1 + B-2 + B-3)

Component B-1 Number of Regular Students (1/2 time or more.)

Number of Positions	Regular Students
0.5	0 - 5,999
1.0	6,000 - 7,499
1.5	7,500 - 9,499
2.0	9,500 - 11,999
2.5	12,000 - 14,999
3.0	15,000 - 18,499
3.5	18,500 - 22,499
4.0	22,500 - Over

Component B-2 Amount of Financial Aid Funds Administered

Number of Positions	Amount
0.5	0 - 499,999
1.0	500,000 - 999,999
1.5	1,000,000 - 1,699,999
2.0	1,700,000 - 2,499,999
2.5	2,500,000 - 3,399,999
3.0	3,400,000 - 4,399,999
3.5	4,400,000 - 5,499,999
4.0	5,500,000 - 6,699,999
4.5	6,700,000 - Over

Component B-3 Number of Financial Aid Applications

Number of Positions	Number
0.5	0 - 499
1.0	500 - 999
1.5	1000 - 1499
2.0	2000 - 2849
2.5	2850 - 3749
3.0	3750 - 4749
3.5	4750 - 5849
4.0	5850 - 7049
4.5	7050 - Over

Again, taking the hypothetical schools figures of 7250 for B-1; $2,332,720 for B-2; and 3650 for B-3, appliction of the formula would yield 1.5 clerks for B-1; 2.0 clerks for B-2 and 2.5 clerks for B-3; B-1 + B-2 + B-3 totals 6 clerical persons.

A school at this level of activity, therefore, would be staffed as follows per the above formulae:

1	Director
5	Counselors
6	Clerical
12	Total

If desired, the same components, with different values, can be used in developing authorization for student assistants in the aid office.

To those who developed and are using this plan, it seems logical persuasive and defensible. While it is not, of course, the perfect solution, it does have several important advantages.

First, the formulae approach to staffing has the overwhelming virtue of being simple. Not only are the data elements themselves easy to read and understand, but they contain no complications and no surprises. It is a straightforward and direct solution to a problem which many find to be very complex.

Second, the formulae addresses the total financial aid staffing needs at one time. There is no need to prepare special analyses to justify an extra position and no need to prepare extensive budget presentations. The budget officials need merely to look at the figures, make a decision, and move on to other matters.

Third, the staffing formulae can also serve as a valuable management tool. The figures express in quantitative terms exactly what the financil aid office has been doing and what it expects to do in the future. Trends can be spotted and measured objectively; the allocation of space and resources can be based upon hard data; and above all, the staff of the financial aid office will bear a direct relationship to the work accomplished.